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NATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS

COMMUNICATIONS FROM PARTIES INCLUDED IN
ANNEX I TO THE CONVENTION

Experience with the review of first national communications

Note by the secretariat

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. Mandate

1. The Conference of the Parties, at its first session (COP 1), by its decision 2/CP.1, (FCCC/CP/1995/7/Add.1) established the process for the review of first communications from Annex I Parties to the Convention, including provisions for the in-depth review of first national communications from such Parties. In its decision 9/CP.2, (FCCC/CP/1996/15/Add.1) the COP requested Annex I Parties to submit a second national communication by 15 April 1997 (except for Parties with economies in transition which should submit their second communications no later than 15 April 1998). The same decision requested the secretariat to continue the review process in accordance with the relevant decisions of the COP. The in-depth reviews of second communications are to be completed before the fifth session of the COP. The Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI), at its sixth session, requested the secretariat to prepare a report on experience with the review of the first national communications for consideration at its seventh session (see FCCC/SBI/1997/16). The present note responds to this request.

B. Scope of the note

2. The present note describes some experience with the review process of first national communications by Annex I Parties. It also contains suggestions for possible action by the SBI related to the review of second national communications from Annex I Parties. Related information can be found in the following documents: the status of submission of second national communications is described in document FCCC/SBI/1997/INF.6; the schedule for the in-depth review of second national communications is contained in document FCCC/SBI/1997/INF.5; the first compilation and synthesis report on second national communications is contained in document FCCC/SBI/1997/19 and Add.1.

C. Possible action by the SBI

3. The SBI is invited to consider the experience with the review of first national communications from Annex I Parties, as well as suggestions made by the secretariat, and may wish to recommend a draft decision to COP 3 based on its conclusions.

II. EXPERIENCE WITH THE REVIEW PROCESS

A. Provisions

4. The in-depth review process is established in accordance with decisions 2/CP.1 and 9/CP.2 of the COP. The purpose of the review is to provide a thorough and comprehensive technical assessment of the implementation of the Convention commitments; to review, in a facilitative, non-confrontational, open and transparent manner, the information contained in the national communications; and to ensure that the COP has accurate, consistent and relevant information at its disposal.

B. Experience and suggestions

5. The process of in-depth review of first national communications was initiated in March 1995 and is expected to be finished by October 1997. By that time the subsidiary bodies will have for their consideration in-depth review reports for all Annex I Parties which submitted their first national communication before 20 March 1997.¹

6. In general, Annex I Parties expressed their satisfaction with the conduct of the review process and indicated that this process allowed them to explain in greater detail than was possible in a national communication the scope of their climate change policies and initiatives, to take into account comments and suggestions made by the review team when preparing their second national communication and to gain an insight into the progress achieved by other Parties in fulfilling their obligations under the Convention.

7. The review of first national communications took longer than initially anticipated owing to a combination of factors, in particular delays in producing draft in-depth review reports by the review teams and in receiving comments from the governments of the Parties concerned. It is suggested that the review teams should aim at producing draft reports in four, to no more than eight weeks following the in-depth review, and that the government of the reviewed Party would aim at submitting to the secretariat its comments on the draft in four, to no more than eight weeks following receipt of the draft. The SBI may consider whether it would be appropriate for the secretariat to assume that, if no response is received in this period of time, the draft is acceptable for the government concerned and that the secretariat can proceed with the publication and distribution of the report. In such an arrangement the government would always have the possibility of indicating that it needs more time to submit its comments. It is expected that these time limits, in combination with the firm schedule of reviews and the re-organization of programme content foreseen in the 1998-1999 budget, would streamline the review process and

¹ The first national communication of Belgium was received by the secretariat in March 1997 and an update was received in August 1997. It is thus envisaged to review both the first national communication of Belgium and the update when reviewing second communications from Annex I Parties in 1998-1999. Ukraine is expected to submit its first national communication in February 1998.

ensure the completion of the in-depth reviews of second communications before the fifth session of the COP as requested by decision 9/CP.2.

8. The revised guidelines for the preparation of national communications by Annex I Parties (see annex of decision 9/CP.2, para. 53) invite Parties to include in their communication an executive summary that would present the key information and data from the full document. The executive summaries are to be translated and distributed widely. The guidelines suggest that the executive summary be of no more than 10 pages. The in-depth review reports at present are published in their original language (usually English) and only the summaries of these reports, with a length of two to four pages, are translated into all official languages of the United Nations.

9. The experience of the secretariat indicates that few Parties limited the executive summary of their communication to 10 pages. In general, these summaries contain complex graphics and tables which significantly complicate their translation and reproduction as standard United Nations documents. In addition, it may be noted that the secretariat received numerous requests for copies of the full texts of the national communications and in-depth review reports but none for the executive summaries of the national communications or summaries of in-depth review reports.

10. In view of the above and taking into account the need to make best use of resources, it is suggested that translation and distribution of the executive summaries of national communications as official UNFCCC documents be discontinued. It is suggested that instead full texts of in-depth review reports be translated into all official languages of the United Nations and distributed widely; this would also eliminate the need to produce and translate summaries of in-depth review reports. The secretariat would strive to limit the in-depth review reports to about 10-12 pages, in a further response to decisions aiming to limit the volume of documentation. If accepted, this suggestion would reduce the overall volume of translated documents relating to the review process in comparison to the previous arrangements.²

11. Under the guidance of the chairmen of the permanent subsidiary bodies, the secretariat has selected experts for participation in the in-depth reviews from among the names provided by Parties and intergovernmental organizations. In so doing, the aim has been to involve as many Parties as possible, to take due account of the need for various professional skills and expertise, balance environmental and developmental perspectives and the geographical distribution of team members, and bear in mind linguistic requirements. One of the criteria in selecting experts for the in-depth reviews was capacity building, particularly in developing country Parties to the Convention. To date, 59 Parties (32 non-Annex I, 18 Annex II and 9 Annex I Parties with economies in transition) have nominated 205 national experts (109 non-Annex I, 67 Annex II and 39 Annex I with economies in transition) to participate in the in-depth reviews. The participation in the 32 in-depth reviews was as follows: 28 experts from 23 non-Annex I Parties took part in 31 reviews, 27 experts from 18 Annex II Parties took part in 31 reviews and 17

² This suggestion will have to be reviewed in the light of the pending General Assembly decision on the provision of conference services (including translation) to the UNFCCC.

experts from 9 Annex I Parties with economies in transition took part in 25 reviews. Some experts took part in more than one review. Three intergovernmental organizations (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, International Energy Agency and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization) have also made available six experts who took part in 17 in-depth reviews.

12. At present, the secretariat is finalizing preparations for the reviews of second national communications from Annex I Parties, including updating the list of experts nominated by governments for participation in in-depth reviews. The secretariat intends to make this list available to delegations at the seventh session of the SBI for possible corrections.

13. From the perspective of capacity building, participation in the in-depth reviews proved to be a useful experience for the experts from non-Annex I Parties. However, as can be seen from the numbers mentioned in paragraph 11, such participation was limited. The SBI may find it appropriate to consider ways and means of increasing participation of non-Annex I Party experts in the review process, in particular of those experts who would likely be involved in the preparation of a national communication in accordance with Article 12.5 of the Convention. Such a consideration may also be relevant to agenda item 3 (b): Communications from Parties not included in Annex I to the Convention.
